

## ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM

### 1. PURPOSE

This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Handbook announces guidelines and application procedures for the Office of Research and Development (ORD) Associate Investigator Program. The provisions of this Handbook apply to 3 of the research services within the ORD (Medical Research Service (MRS), Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (RR&D), and Health Services Research and Development Service (HSR&D)).

### 2. BACKGROUND

The intent of the Associate Investigator Program is to provide research training for clinician and non-clinician scientists with little or no research experience. The training will be provided by mentors who are senior principal investigators of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Research and Development (R&D) non-mentored, national peer reviewed research project awards or senior investigators who are part of Centers of Excellence or Research Enhancement Award Programs (REAPs) funded by MRS, RR&D, or HSR&D. **NOTE:** *Hereafter, all R&D non-mentored, national peer reviewed research project awards are referred to as Merit Review.*

### 3. SCOPE

a. **Qualifications.** Applications will be accepted from VA medical centers that have currently funded Centers of Excellence, REAPs, or Merit Review programs.

(1) Recipients of Centers of Excellence and REAPs are expected to participate in the training of new investigators. Funds for trainees budgeted in Centers of Excellence and REAPs will not be distributed until the candidates have been identified and approved by the appropriate VHA Headquarters research service. Merit Review programs may also provide post doctoral research training through the Associate Investigator Program. Funds for approved trainees of Merit Review recipients will be provided as a supplement to the Merit Review program.

(2) Proposed Associate Investigators may hold the M.D., D.D.S., or Ph.D. degrees (or equivalent terminal degree). Applicants who hold the M.D. or D.D.S. degree may not be more than 2-years post-residency or clinical specialty or sub-specialty training. Applicants who hold the Ph.D. degree must have received their degree within 4 years of application and must have been engaged in post-doctoral research activities during that period.

b. **Appointment.** Participants may be approved for an appointment of up to 2 years, with a possible 1 or 2 year extension. The proposed appointment period may not exceed the award period of the mentor's funded program and in no circumstances may exceed 4 years.

(1) During the appointment period, Associate Investigators are not eligible to receive other VA research funding. It is expected that upon successful completion of this program, candidates will apply for other VA research funding, such as Career Development, Medical Research Merit Review Entry Program (MREP) Awards, or MRS, RR&D, or HSR&D Merit Review Awards.

(2) All VA appointments are on a temporary basis as time-limited appointments. Eligible clinicians may be appointed under Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7405 (a)(1). Title 38 appointments are determined locally, but may not exceed the level for Intermediate Grade Step 1. Associate Investigators are excluded from all elements of Physicians' and Dentists' Special Pay. Non-clinician Ph.D. applicants may be appointed under Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 213.3227(a) (Schedule B). Grade determinations for Title 5 employees will be based on qualification standards in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) handbook or relevant VA personnel guide, but appointments may not be made above the level of General Service (GS)-11. Title 38 and Title 5 employees are required to meet the VA and Federal appointment hiring and citizenship requirements as applicable.

**c. Sponsors**

(1) Each applicant must have a sponsor who is the principal investigator on a VA Merit Review Program at the time of application through the projected duration of support for the Associate Investigator. Principal investigators of MREPs, Career Development awardees or Research Career Scientists who have no VA research support other than salary are not eligible to serve as sponsors.

(2) In the case of an Associate Investigator supported by a Merit Review Program, the sponsor shall also be the mentor. In the case of an Associate Investigator supported by a Center of Excellence or REAP, a senior investigator associated with the Center or REAP may serve as mentor.

**d. Submission of Applications.** Applications must be prepared in accordance with instructions contained in Appendix B. Applications may be submitted at any time after the Center of Excellence, REAP, or individual Merit Review program is funded and should not be submitted as part of the research proposal.

**e. Review of Applications.** Applications will be reviewed to ensure suitability of the training and career development plan to the background and career goal of the applicant. The reviews will be conducted on an ongoing basis as applications are received.

**4. INQUIRIES**

Information regarding points of contact for issues related to this Handbook is contained in Appendix A.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information contact:

**a. Medical Research Service (121E)**

Terri Gleason, Ph.D. 202-408-3600 [theresa.gleason@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:theresa.gleason@hq.med.va.gov)

**b. Rehabilitation Research and Development Service (122A)**

Danielle M. Kerkovich, Ph.D. 202-254-0258 [danielle@vard.org](mailto:danielle@vard.org)

**c. Health Services Research and Development Service (124D)**

Robert Small 202-273-8256 [robert.small@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:robert.small@hq.med.va.gov)

**Please Note:**

The AI award now includes a one-time \$1000 travel award in order to present their VA research at a scientific meeting. The travel award must be requested and include the following information:

Name of meeting

Date of meeting

Evidence that abstract accepted for presentation

Cost breakdown by airfare, hotel, per diem, transfer, .. (but not registration)

The travel award request and any questions should be directed to

Ms Terri Carlton

Veterans Affairs

VA Rehab R&D Service (122P)

810 Vermont Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20420

202.254.0265

[terrilynn.carlton@hq.med.va.gov](mailto:terrilynn.carlton@hq.med.va.gov)

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR PREPARATION AND SUBMISSION  
OF APPLICATIONS FOR THE ASSOCIATE INVESTIGATOR PROGRAM**

**1. Format.** Applications should consist of single-spaced typed pages. Use only letter-quality print; do not use a dot matrix printer. Do not use photo reduction or font size smaller than 11 point.

**2. Content.** Each application should consist of the following materials:

a. **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Form 10-1313-1.** VA Form 10-1313-1 Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Research and Development (R&D) Merit Review Application cover page. In box 4 add date of the submission. In box 9 insert the name and degree of proposed Associate Investigator. Following the name insert the words “Associate Investigator Program” in parenthesis. In box 10 use title of mentor’s program. Do not use Boxes 11, 12, 13, 18 or 20.

b. **Nominating Letter.** A nominating letter from the Medical Center Director stating that the R&D Committee has approved the submission of the application. Alternatively, applications may contain two separate nominating letters from the Medical Center Director and R&D Committee. The Director's letter is expected to include any information pertinent to administrative matters, such as the commitment to offer a staff position to the applicant at the completion of the award or the date of citizenship eligibility for a non-citizen. One of the letters must acknowledge a commitment from the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development (ACOS/R&D) to review the trainee’s progress annually.

c. **Curriculum Vitae.** A Curriculum Vitae, which includes the education and employment history as well as honors, awards, publications and presentations made by the participant. Career aspirations, contributions to the ongoing research program of the mentor, and any other relevant information should be included.

d. **Mentor’s Support Letter and Description of the Training Program.** A letter from the proposed mentor must be included with the application. This letter is critical for application because it describes the content of the applicant's proposed research-training experience from the mentor's point of view. This letter should contain:

(1) A brief description of the distribution of the mentor's time in research, patient care, teaching and administration.

(3) An explicit description of the mentor's current obligations, including the number of residents, fellows and other trainees that the mentor is currently supervising in research as well as past and projected trainees, with inclusive dates.

(3) A description of the plan for mentoring the applicant, including the role of the applicant in the mentor's research program, formal coursework and training experiences planned by the mentor for the applicant, nature of the mentor's interaction with the applicant, percentage of the mentor's effort that will be devoted to the applicant, and the degree and type of interaction that the applicant will gain from other researchers in the mentor's program or elsewhere at the medical center.

(4) A description of the selection process and reasons for selecting this applicant.

e. **Citizenship.** Documentation in the form of a letter or memo from local Human Resource Management (HRM) office stating the applicant meets citizenship requirements.

f. **Facilities Available.** In a paragraph or two, describe the office and research space and its location, specifying whether the space is in a VA facility. If the research space is not in a VA facility, documentation of the prior approval of the Chief Research and Development Officer (CRADO) must be provided with the application.

**3. Incomplete Applications.** Applications will be considered incomplete and returned if they are not submitted in accordance with established procedures. The responsibility for following instructions and preparing a complete submission lies with the research office at the originating VA medical center.

**4. Due Dates.** Applications may be submitted at any time within the funding period of the parent award.

**5. Review Process.** Applications for the Associate Investigator Program will be evaluated on the appropriateness of the proposed participants based on the credentials presented. Career aspirations and contributions to the ongoing research program of the mentor will also be considered. Letters of support, research training and background will be important factors.

**6. Awards.** Funds will be available as a supplement to the current Merit Review program of the mentor, or as part of the funding for a Center of Excellence or Research Enhancement Award Program (REAP). Funds to support those applications selected for award will be made available within approximately 2 months of application receipt.

**7. Mailing Addresses.** The original and 6 copies of the application should be mailed to the address listed for the appropriate research service/program:

**a. Medical Research Service**

Medical Research Service (121E)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 408-3600

**b. Rehabilitation R&D Service**

Rehabilitation R&D Service (122A)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 408-3670

**c. Health Services R&D Service**

Health Services R&D Service (124D)  
810 Vermont Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
(202) 273-8256